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In My View

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Jon Oliver

IN MY VIEW . . .

With Friends Like the Press, Who Needs Enemies?

Sir,

As a former journalist, I am in complete agreement with Captain Wentz that America needs a "War Press Act." I am also convinced that the majority of Americans, given their current level of sophistication, would support such an act. In stating the reasons for my views, however, I will not give the press as many benefits-of-the-doubt as did Captain Wentz, for in discussing the press in general, one is not dealing with an "unknown quantity."

To begin, the press, and by its own admission, has adopted an attorney-like adversarial relationship with the US Government. Given this role it has a mandate to be an ardent critic of the government, including those actions undertaken by our naval and military forces. The implications of such a posture thus become apparent where press coverage of military activities is involved, particularly since the press generally opposes military action of any scope for any reason.

Second, the press has demonstrated time and again its careless disregard for national security matters in its rush to be "first with the news." This is often demonstrated by the airing of "leaked" information to the general public and to any potential enemy agents who may wish to take notes. In this regard, the press apparently believes that it is better suited than policy makers and military leaders to determine what constitutes sensitive information. Interestingly, the press reacts with moral indignation to intelligence gathering operations ("spying") conducted by the government, yet when apprehended in similar situations, it claims a constitutional right to do so.

Third, the press has lost much of the credibility that it once enjoyed with the public. This is due largely in part to the increased competition within the media community and the ratings "wars." Because of this, once objective news reporting has taken a backseat to tabloid-style sensationalism by the press in its quest for a greater share of the media audience. Given this scenario, one must seriously question whether the press can demonstrate enough responsibility to be entrusted with *any* news of a sensitive nature regarding military actions.

Lastly, the press, obviously through a bloated sense of self-importance, has appointed itself as the "watch dog" of government and the "guardian" of the

citizen's "right to know" without any mandate from the public to perform in such a capacity. For these reasons and more, I believe that the public would support a War Press Act.

If this sounds like a scathing indictment of the press in general, it is. However, I have awarded it no undeserved laurels.

Bill Baggett
Smyrna, Tennessee

Plumbers, Garbage Men, and Undertakers Will Survive

Sir,

The debate stirred up by Captain William M. Shaw III, USA in his commentary "Clausewitz: A Non-Strategy for Today," was properly placed in better perspective by Colonel Harry G. Summers, Jr., USA, and then further drew a firm response from Lieutenant Commander Joseph M. Saur, USN as to whether the American people "seek peace at any price." This leads me to a comment as to what seems to have really happened to the masses of our people.

The problem is not only with Americans, but with any heavily industrialized and technologically advanced society, whether in Western Europe, Eastern Asia, urban Africa, Australia and South America.

When life-support needs of a people no longer require total concentration—be it matters of food, shelter, clothing or personal security—the skills, knowledge and understanding of what really is required to obtain these essentials tends to disappear. "Somboddy else," often some government activity, is expected to make and keep things right. The plumber, the garbage man, the supermarket food supply, the police and firemen, the Army, Navy and Air Force, even the undertaker, all become some distant and semi-invisible folk who are automatically operating to keep life on the normal course and pattern.

The farther one is removed by generation gap or social position from ever having had to take care of any of this by one's own self, the greater the belief that it all happens easily without any personal interjection.

American personality and character have not really degenerated from their historical strengths; rather, the high-tech environment, like an opiate, dulls and changes the perception. Perhaps the intellectually elite are almost irreversible, but "down on the farms," "deep in the mines and mills," and "trucking those 18-wheelers along our life-line highways" are men and women who still understand the fundamentals of life support and true freedom, just as in the pioneer days of old.

When disaster hits, be it from natural or man-made assault, here lies our strength with the capability for correction and rehabilitation.

Always an optimist, trusting in God and my fellow-men, I'm sure we'll make it well into the 21st century with or without our politicians, environmentalists, scientists, social security, welfare and even the newspapers and TV commentators' advice. After that I doubt that I'll be able to help.

Raymond J. Schneider
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